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ABSTRACT

After a Federal court ordered school desegregation in Dallas, Texas, a study was conducted to determine factors influencing black parents' attitudes toward their children's school. Parents who said their children were in racially mixed schools were shown to be far more satisfied than those who said their children were in all black schools. Broad criteria were employed to define a mixed school. When children's schools were identified, it was evident that many parents were mistaken about whether their children actually attended mixed schools. Black parents who perceived the school to be mixed were found to be more satisfied with almost all aspects of that school, whether that school was really mixed or was all black. Perception, rather than reality, was thus concluded to be the determinant of attitudes. (Author/GC)

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PERCEPTION VERSUS REALITY IN EDUCATIONAL ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL DESEGREGATION

Research Paper

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I INTRODUCTION: THE DALLAS DESEGREGATION CASE

In 1964, when Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, 98 per cent of black students in the South were attending all-black or mostly black schools. As early as 1955, the first school desegregation case was filed in Dallas, "Albert Bell vs. Robert S. Rippy." In December of 1956, the federal district judge, Wm. H. Atwell, ruled against the plaintiff, feeling that the courts should not take note of the work of the social scientists. In 1957, this ruling was reversed by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Judge Atwell then ordered complete desegregation of all Dallas schools for the 1957-58 year. That order for complete desegregation was found unacceptable by the Fifth Circuit because it was too drastic. Therefore, in 1959, the school district was ordered to prepare a realistic desegregation plan within thirty days.

The plan submitted was a "stairstep plan" maintaining neighborhood zones and integrating the schools one grade per year beginning with the first grade. The plan to integrate the schools was begun in 1961 and, in 1968, a plan to desegregate faculty was started. However, in October of 1970, Eddie Tasby filed a suit in Federal District Court which charged that the school district was continuing to maintain a dual school system through use of neighborhood assignment plans, the choice of school building sites, and the staffing of teaching and administrative positions. On June 6, 1971, Federal District Judge William Taylor returned a finding that "all vestiges of the dual school system still remain in Dallas." He instructed the School Board to eradicate the dual system. The case continued to be argued in

circuit court and there was no decision until July 23, 1975, when the case was remanded to Judge Taylor. Judge Taylor encouraged the business leaders of Dallas to formulate a workable plan. It was felt that a plan designed by influential business leaders would more easily gain acceptance. The Dallas Alliance -- a business community service organization -- formulated a plan which eventually (March 10, 1976) was adopted by the court.

To facilitate integration, the plan provided for busing students in grades 4-8 in four of the six sub-districts established in the Dallas Independent School District. East Oak Cliff (EOC), a predominantly black community in the southern portion of the city, was one of the two areas excluded from busing; the Seagoville sub-district was excluded since it was considered to be "naturally" integrated. Students in the other four sub-districts were bused to other schools to improve the black-white ratios. The desegregation plan also called for curriculum innovations, e.g., magnet schools available to all students to provide special academic and interest orientations, minority ratios for teachers and administrators.

In 1976 the Lichten Foundation for Human Rights decided to institute a study to see how the predominantly black parents in East Oak Cliff, where there was no integration, felt about busing and integrated schools. Would they approve of busing in order to integrate schools? Would they approve of busing to attend magnet schools? Did they feel that their children had anything to gain by attending these integrated schools? Were they satisfied with the schools their children were attending?

II METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The Lichten survey is a personal interview survey conducted by twenty trained interviewers in East Oak Cliff in February, March and April of 1977. The questionnaire consisted of seventy-three questions which included a set of closed ended questions where the respondent could place his/her feelings on a 5 point attitudinal scale and a number of "open ended questions" where the respondent was asked to specify reasons and feelings. A pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted in late 1976.

The questionnaire was administered on a personal basis to parents or guardians of children in grades 4-8. The average face-to-face interview took thirty minutes and was conducted in the respondents' homes. The interviewers were required to call back at least three times at each specific sample address to insure accurate sampling procedures.

The questionnaire consisted of a large number of demographic questions (age, income, residence in the area, mother and father's occupation) and a number of general attitudinal questions (status in the world compared to parents, questions on aspirations for their children). However, the prime orientation of the questionnaire was toward feelings and knowledge about schools their children were attending, feelings about mixed and magnet schools, and feelings about busing.

The sample for the study was randomly selected from the census tracts in the East Oak Cliff area. Interviewers were provided with a computer-

generated list of 1,000 addresses randomly selected from approximately 30,000 household addresses in the 17 census tracts that comprise East Oak Cliff. Random samples were taken in each of these tracts. It was expected that one house in four would contain a child in the required grades. The final sample consisted of 187 completed interviews. Seventy per cent of the respondents were women (primarily mothers). Checks were made on 10% of those interviewed to insure that the interviewer had actually contacted the required interviewee.

Ninty-seven per cent of the population in East Oak Cliff is black. A study of the composition of the 187 interviews reveals that 97% of these interviews were with black families. As of 1976, East Oak Cliff contained 28,000 students, approximately twenty per cent of the Dallas Independent School District population of 139,080.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, 8 of these 17 tracts are low income neighborhoods. The sample consists of a mixture of low income and medium income families. The median family income for the 80% of the sample that gave income figures was $11,400.

VI OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE SCHOOLS

Questions about overall satisfaction with the schools and about satisfaction with specific aspects of the schools were asked using a standard 5 point attitude scale upon which the respondent could place her/his answer. The scale read as follows:

1. Very dissatisfied
2. Somewhat dissatisfied
3. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
4. Somewhat satisfied
5. Very satisfied

Those who said they didn't know or couldn't answer were grouped in a separate category called "don't know."

Generally the overall reaction was positive. Twenty-three percent were very satisfied, forty-one percent were somewhat satisfied. Seven percent were very dissatisfied, thirteen percent were somewhat dissatisfied, and the remaining sixteen percent were neutral.

After the overall question on satisfaction with the school had been raised, specific questions on the following twelve issues were asked, using the same attitude scale to measure opinions:

(1) learning
(2) teaching
(3) discipline
(4) treatment of children
(5) buildings and equipment

(6) books and reading materials

(7) reading

(8) writing

(9) mathematics

(10) art, music, poetry

(11) accomplishments of blacks

(12) how the principal runs the school.

Table 1 summarizes the answers. Generally, 15-26% expressed dissatisfaction, 17 to 31% were very satisfied, 29-47% were somewhat satisfied. The rest were neutral or didn't know. The highest level of satisfaction was expressed about training in the arts, music and poetry. Parents were least satisfied with discipline (a common national finding) and with learning about the accomplishments of black people.

Table 1

Satisfaction with various aspects of the school their child attends

Satisfaction Scale	Over-all	How much child learns	Teachers Methods	Disci-pline	Treat-ment of child	Build-ings Equip-ment	Teach-ing Mate-rial
Very satisfied	23%	27%	31	25	28	18	18
Somewhat satisfied	41	37	36	36	46	40	43
Neutral	12	9	14	13	11	13	11
Somewhat dissatisfied	13	16	11	16	10	16	16
Very dissatisfied	7	5	4	6	3	4	5
Don't know	4	6	4	4	2	9	7
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Satisfaction Scale	Reading	Writing	Mathe-matics	Art Music Plays Poetry	Accom-plishments of Blacks	How Principal Runs School
Very satisfied	22	17	22	21	22	26
Somewhat satisfied	40	46	40	44	29	40
Neutral	10	13	10	15	12	13
Somewhat dissatisfied	12	11	15	7	16	6
Very dissatisfied	4	3	4	2	10	6
Don't know	12	10	9	11	11	9
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

IV ATTITUDES TOWARD MIXED SCHOOLS

In the decision to desegregate Dallas it was decided not to bus students into or out of the East Oak Cliff area unless they were attending magnet schools. Thus, after a year of court ordered desegregation, most of the students remained in primarily undesegregated schools. Of the 187 parents or guardians interviewed, 44 (23.5%) believed that their child was attending a mixed school.

In the interview, a mixed school is defined for the respondents as a "school that included quite a few blacks and whites and some Mexican Americans." Parents were asked to compare their current schools, or all black schools, to a mixed school. Forty-seven percent felt that the mixed school would be a little better or much better. Forty-one percent felt it would be about the same and 6% felt it would be worse. See Table II. The main areas stressed by the respondents were better facilities and the ability to meet a wider group of people. Fifty percent felt their children would learn more in a mixed school, thirty-five percent about the same and 9% less. See Table II. .

In addition to these questions about learning, all respondents were asked their opinion on the following proposition: "Having mixed schools is the only way for blacks to get an education as good as what whites get?" Fifty percent said they agreed with the statement. Twelve percent were neutral and 38% disagreed. Better learning environment, better facilities and better qualified personnel were the principal reasons cited for preferring a mixed school. Black parents were not

Table 11.

A. Feelings about how mixed schools would compare with all black schools (your present school).

Much better	13%
A little better	34%
About the same	41%
A little worse	2%
Much worse	4%
Don't know	6%
	100%

B. How do you feel about how much your children would learn (in a mixed school)?

A lot more	21%
A little more	29%
About the same	35%
A little less	7%
Much less	2%
Don't know	6%
	100%

C. Having mixed schools is the only way for blacks to get an education as good as whites get.

Strongly agree	25%
Agree somewhat	25%
Neither	10%
Disagree, somewhat	18%

Strongly disagree	20%
Don't know	2%
	100%

Doing away with all black schools would mean that blacks would have less to say than they do now about what happens in the schools.

Strongly agree	10%
Agree, somewhat	15%
Neither	16%
Disagree, somewhat	20%
Strongly disagree	34%
Don't know	5%
	100%

particularly worried that doing away with all black schools would mean that they would have less to say than they do now about what happens in schools. Only 25% felt they would lose some influence. See Table II-C.

The prime emphasis of the study was an assessment of the feelings of parents in the East Oak Cliff area about mixed schools. The responses to questions about mixed schools were tabulated. They indicated a preference for mixed schools.

Another way to examine the opinions toward mixed schools is to compare the attitudes toward the schools of the parents who believe their children are in mixed schools and parents who believe their children are in the segregated schools. In the Lichten study, 44 parents claimed that their children were in mixed schools and 139 said their child was not in a mixed school. The remaining 4 were uncertain whether their child attended a mixed school. Table III compares satisfaction of both groups of parents on a number of issues.

This table points out a significant difference in the level of satisfaction expressed by the parents who state that their children are in mixed schools and those who feel that their children are in primarily black schools. On overall satisfaction when we combine the two positive satisfaction categories, 80% of those in mixed schools are satisfied while 60% of those in segregated schools are satisfied.

On each and every question about learning, there is a significant difference in satisfaction between parents who believe they have children in mixed schools and in those who think their children are in segregated schools. Seventy-three percent were satisfied with discipline in the mixed schools while 50% were satisfied with discipline in the all black

Table III

Comparison of Opinions of Parents Who Said Their Children are in Mixed vs Non-Mixed Schools

Satisfaction Scale	Overall		How much Child Learns		Teachers Methods	
	Mixed	Non-Mixed	Mixed	Non-Mixed	Mixed	Non-Mixed
Very Satisfied	32	21	30	25	52	25
Somewhat Satisfied	48	39	43	36	32	38
Neutral	7	14	5	10	7	15
Somewhat Dissatisfied	7	15	7	17	2	12
Very Dissatisfied	4	7	4	6	4	3
Don't Know	2	4	11	6	3	7
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Satisfaction Scale	Discipline		Treatment of Child		Building Equipment	
	Mixed	Non-Mixed	Mixed	Non-Mixed	Mixed	Non-Mixed
Very Satisfied	39	21	41	25	34	13
Somewhat Satisfied	34	37	45	46	50	40
Neutral	7	14	7	12	2	14
Somewhat Dissatisfied	9	17	2	12	9	18
Very Dissatisfied	5	7	5	2	2	6
Don't Know	6	4	0	3	3	9
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table III(Continued)

Satisfaction Scale	Teaching Materials		Reading		Writing	
	Mixed	Non-Mixed	Mixed	Non-Mixed	Mixed	Non-Mixed
Very Satisfied	39	21	34	18	32	12
Somewhat Satisfied	34	37	41	40	41	48
Neutral	7	14	7	12	7	14
Somewhat Dissatisfied	9	17	14	12	16	10
Very Dissatisfied	4	7	2	5	2	4
Don't Know	7	4	2	13	2	12
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Satisfaction Scale	Mathematics		Art Music Poetry		Accomp-lishment of Blacks	
	Mixed	Non-Mixed	Mixed	Non-Mixed	Mixed	Non-Mixed
Very Satisfied	39	17	38	17	41	18
Somewhat Satisfied	39	40	52	41	30	28
Neutral	0	14	2	19	7	13
Somewhat Dissatisfied	16	14	5	8	11	17
Very Dissatisfied	2	4	2	1	7	11
Don't Know	4	11	1	14	4	13
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

schools. Parents of children in mixed schools felt that facilities such as buildings and equipment and teaching materials were better than by parents of children in all black schools.

As far as subject matter is concerned, once again the parents in the mixed schools were more satisfied with reading, writing, mathematics, art, music and poetry than were parents in the segregated schools. Even learning about the accomplishments of blacks was thought to be more satisfactory by parents of students in the mixed schools than by parents of students in the segregated schools.

Since the satisfaction of parents whose children attended the mixed school is so much higher than those whose children attend the all black schools, some explanation of the characteristics of these parents was made to see whether there were noticeable differences in the two groups.

Length of residence in the neighborhood showed no relation to attendance at mixed schools. There was some indication that families with a large number of children and these with other younger children at home were more likely to have children in the mixed school. Financial status as reflected by annual income, monthly house payments and feelings about whether they are better or worse off than their parents seemed to bear no relation to enrollment in mixed schools. When reactions to the proposition that "having mixed schools is the only way for blacks to get an education as good as whites get," low income families were more likely to agree with the statement than were families with incomes over $10,000 a year.

In summary, parents who feel that their children are in mixed schools are more satisfied with every aspect of the schools than are the parents who believe their children are in all black schools. Younger

and larger families are more likely to have children in the mixed schools. This may indicate a willingness to try the magnet schools. Finally low income people are the most likely to feel that mixed schools are the only way to get an education equal to that of whites.

V PERCEPTION VS. REALITY

In the previous tables we have shown that parents who believed that their children attended mixed schools were 15 to 20 percentage points higher on the satisfaction scales on overall aspects of the schools, as well as 11 specific topics ranging from discipline, through the "3 R's" to learning about the accomplishment of blacks. Investigation of the schools that these children attended revealed that of the 44 parents who claimed that their children attended mixed schools, 22 actually had children in a mixed school, 20 had children in a primarily black school and 2 hadn't revealed the name of the school the child was attending. Of the 139 who said the child was in an all-black school, actually 20 had children in a mixed school, 100 had children in an all-black school and the remaining 19 had not specified a school.

A preliminary comparison of the parents who thought the children were in a mixed school showed very little differences in their satisfaction in various aspects of the school amongst those whose children actually were in the mixed school and those who actually were not in a mixed school. Similar results were evident for those who thought the children were in an all-black school. The attitudes of the 20 parents whose children actually attended a mixed school differed little from the 100 parents whose children attended an all-black school. At this point, each of the groups was very small (22, 20, 20 and 100, respectively) and it was not feasible to compare differences between proportions. Therefore, the eta statistic was used. Eta is a measure of association used when the independent variable is nominal level and the dependent variable is internal or ratio level. When eta is squared it has an intuitive interpretation as the proportion of variance

in the dependent variable accounted for by the independent variable. Eta squared is often referred to as the correlation ratio.[1] It was decided to compare the eta statistics for the parents who classified their children's schools as mixed, versus non mixed, with the scores for the four categories: (1) mixed-actually is mixed, (2) mixed-not mixed, (3) not mixed-actually mixed, (4) not mixed-actually not mixed. Table IV presents these comparisons where the attitudinal scale variables are the dependent variables and the mixed-non mixed categories are the independent (nominal level) variables.

TABLE IV

Comparison of Attitudes Toward Schools of Parents With Children in Mixed and Non Mixed Schools With 4-Way Classifications: Mixed-Actually Mixed, Mixed-Not Mixed, Not Mixed-Actually Mixed, and Not Mixed-Not Mixed.

East Oak Cliff, Dallas Independent School District, 1977

Eta Statistics (dependent variable attitude)

Variable	2-Way Classification	4-Way Classification
1. Overall Attitude Toward Schools	.218	.177
2. How Much Child Learns	.164	.188
3. Teacher's Methods	.249	.254
4. Discipline	.356	.191
5. Treatment of Child	.397	.219
6. Buildings and Equipment	.366	.210
7. Teaching Materials	.402	.250
8. Reading	.372	.159
9. Writing	.377	.125
10. Mathematics	.379	.182
11. Art, Music & Poetry	.460	.230
12. Accomplishments of Blocks	.338	.199
13. Attitude Toward Principal	.487	.196

[1] Nie et.al., Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, New York: McGraw Hall, Inc., 2nd edition, p. 230.

Except for the first three variables, "Overall Attitude Toward Schools," "How Much the Child Learns," and "Teacher's Methods," where the eta scores are generally close and somewhat higher for the four-way classification, there seems to be a much higher level of explanation of favorable attitudes when we use the two-way classification (mixed vs. non mixed schools). Thus it would seem that perception may be more important than reality in determining favorable parental attitudes toward schools.

VI ATTITUDES TOWARD BUSING

While the parents generally favor mixed schools, the idea of busing to achieve integration is not popular. Forty-three percent were very unhappy or a little unhappy about a bus ride of one-half hour per day. Fifty-one percent were unhappy about a bus ride that would take one hour per day. Eight percent of all parents said that it currently takes less than 15 minutes for their children to get to school. Most of the reasons against busing cited the time problems ("have to get up earlier," "get home later" or just "wasted time.") Twenty percent felt that the buses were unsafe due to rowdy children or unsafe drivers. Eleven percent felt they wouldn't be able to pick up the children in case of an emergency.

Busing was more favorably received by parents when it was linked to curriculum programs. For the fourth through sixth grade, there are a number of magnet schools called Vanguards. Parents were asked about these magnets to see if they would approve of busing to a magnet school. Thirty-two percent felt that they would be unhappy if the students had to bus one-half hour or more to these s hools.

VII RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

East Oak Cliff residents interviewed were a stable, primarily black group who had lived in the South for most of their lives. Families tended to be large and there were many two-worker families. Although there were a few professionals, most people were employed in skilled or semi-skilled jobs. Most people felt that they were better off than their parents had been. Median income for those families who reported incomes was $11,400; half of the areas included, however, were classified by the Federal Government as low income neighborhoods.

Overall Satisfaction:

On specific and overall satisfaction questions about the schools their children attended, 15% to 26% expressed dissatisfaction, 17% to 31% were very satisfied and 29% to 47% were somewhat satisfied. Parents were least satisfied with discipline and learning the accomplishments of black people. They were most satisfied with training in the arts, music and poetry.

Attitudes Toward Mixed Schools:

1. Feelings about mixed schools ("a school that includes quite a few blacks and whites and some Mexican Americans") indicate that, on balance, more people feel that such schools would offer better educational opportunities in many areas (46% better, 41% same, 6% worse, 7% don't know). Better facilities and ability to meet a wider group of people were frequently cited. Fifty percent felt their children learn more in a mixed school, 35% said the same and 9% less.

2. Response to the proposition, "Having mixed schools is the only way for blacks to get an education as good as what whites get," indicated that 50% of parents agreed, 12% were neutral and 38% disagreed. Poor families were more likely to agree that mixed schools were the only way for blacks to get an education as good as what whites get. Perhaps this is a reflection of their dissatisfaction with their status.

3. Satisfaction with schools on every single issue (teaching methods, equipment, discipline, treatment of child, reading, writing, mathematics, art, music, poetry, accomplishment of blacks, how much the child learns and overall satisfaction) is 15 to 25 percentage points higher for parents who say their children attend mixed schools as compared to parents of children who attend nonmixed schools.

4. While parents generally favor mixed schools, busing is not popular. Parents are more willing to bus students to magnet schools which feature career orientation, accelerated learning and strong discipline rather than a magnet which emphasizes pollution control and outdoor activities.

5. The parents are more willing to bus their children for specific curriculum programs than to bus for integrative purposes.